

NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION
LANDS IN WILDERNESS

STATE: California

DISTRICT: California Desert

COUNTY: Imperial/San Diego

FIELD OFFICE: El Centro Field Office
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WILDERNESS AREA: Jacumba Mountains Wilderness

WA NUMBER: 035087

1. BACKGROUND LAND USE PLAN AND CONFORMANCE

In accordance with Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 6303.1, the proposed action is in conformance with the following approved land use plans: California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan (1980) as amended; Recovery Plan for Bighorn Sheep in the Peninsular Ranges (Recovery Plan 2000); the Wilderness Act of 1964; sections 103(a), (e), and (f) of the California Desert Protection Act of 1994; and the 1996 memorandum of understanding between CDF&G and the BLM for activities in wilderness. A minimum tool analysis was conducted in a programmatic environmental assessment (EA-CA-660-01-50) prepared by the BLM in August of 2001 for research activities in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains. The Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep (*Orvis canadensis nelsoni*) (PRBS) inhabits the Peninsular mountain ranges of southern California and northern Baja California. This population is listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

2. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

The project is a cooperative effort between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the BLM to research PRBS demographics and movement from the Interstate 8 (I-8) south to the U.S./Mexico border. The project is intended to help achieve the goals identified in the Recovery Plan, namely to monitor the PRBS population abundance, distribution and recruitment and research habitat use/dispersal. In addition data provided by the project may help the BLM more effectively manage PRBS populations on the BLM lands.

The research project includes the surveying and capturing of PRBS using a small helicopter, such

as a MD Hughes 500D, with a contractor-supplied pilot, mugger and net gunner (capture crew). The capture crew will survey within designated search areas within and just north of the Jacumba Wilderness to locate PRBS for capture. Once located, target PRBS will be directed into a safe area where they can be netted using a net gun. For capture, the pilot will position the helicopter close enough to the ground to allow the gunner to net, and the mugger to jump out of the helicopter to secure the target PRBS. Care will be taken to ensure the PRBS are not harmed during capture.

After capture the PRBS will be transported via helicopter to the processing station located within In-Ko-Pah Gorge, outside of the Jacumba Wilderness, where a CDFW ground crew, assisted by USFWS and the BLM personnel, will take physiological measurements and collar the PRBS with GPS-equipped collars. A CDFW veterinarian will participate in all captures and translocations to ensure the health of all animals and attend to any health concerns. Vital signs (temperature, pulse, and respiration) will be assessed immediately upon arrival at base camp and monitored during processing. During processing, blood will be collected by jugular venipuncture in serum, EDTA, and trace mineral tubes. Blood will be assayed for chemistry and tested for a variety of disease pathogens. The ground crew will also obtain morphometric measurements, estimate age by horn rings and tooth replacement, and collect nasal swabs, hair and fecal samples. The ground crew will use ultrasonography to measure maximum subcutaneous fat thickness on the rump to calculate a body condition score. In addition, ultrasonography will be used to determine pregnancy in ewes. Samples will be processed as per the methods identified by the CDFW Wildlife Investigations Laboratory (WIL). Captured PRBS will be fitted with VHF and/or GPS collars and marked with numbered and colored ear tags. During processing, recorders will take information specific to each animal on capture data sheets and a capture log. Care will be taken to ensure that the collars fit snugly and do not slide up and down the animal's neck. To minimize stress during processing, the PRBS will be blindfolded, hobbled, and retained in a position which allows the normal digestive processes and eructation to occur. Water will be available and used as necessary to cool the animals. After handling is complete, PRBS will be transported via helicopter to their initial capture location, where the capture crew will release the animals. Traveling distances for captured sheep are not anticipated to be longer than approximately five miles each way. The entire operation, from capture to release is expected to take about 60 minutes.

The project is anticipated to occur October thru November 2013 and 2014. Survey and capture activities are anticipated to last approximately three days however, scheduling may vary slightly due to unforeseen weather or equipment problems.

3. LEGAL DESCRIPTION

Helicopter landings associated with captures, releases, or emergencies could occur in any portion of the Jacumba Mountains Wilderness. Sheep captured within wilderness will be transported to a processing site outside of the wilderness within In-Ko-Pah Gorge (NAD 83 32° 40.7602 N: 116° 5.5819 W) for collaring/processing and then returned to the original capture site.

4. CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

1971 - PRBS listed as Rare by the State of California.

1974 - Estimated PRBS population is 1171.

1984 - PRBS listed as threatened by the State of California to conform with an amendment to the California Endangered Species Act.

1988 - Estimated population is 570.

1992 - Estimated population is 400.

1993 - Estimated population is 327-524.

1998 - Estimated population is 334.


March 18, 1998 - PRBS is listed as endangered by the USFWS.

October 2000- Recovery Plan for Bighorn Sheep in the Peninsular Ranges issued by the USFWS.

October 2012- The USFWS, CDFW and the BLM implement the first year of collaring on the BLM property just north of the Jacumba Wilderness.

2013 - Request by USFWS for authorization for research in Jacumba Wilderness during 2013 and 2014.

- Please send any comments on this activity to the BLM El Centro Field Office's Wilderness Coordinator, John Johnson by phone at (760)337-4442 or by email at jojohnso@blm.gov.



Acting Field Manager



Date

